

REMARKS

Claims 1-34 are pending in this application. Selected claims are amended to clarify the invention. Regarding method claims 28 and 34, Applicants have amended these claims to remove non-essential features and to clarify that the opening is the inflator opening.

Applicants thank the Examiner and the Examiner's supervisor for the courtesies extended to the Applicants' representative during the personal interview conducted on February 7, 2007. During the personal interview, the Examiner acknowledged that method claims 28-32 and 34 are allowable over the applied prior art. Applicants further discussed the features of the device claims in view of the cited prior art and agreed to amend the claims to more clearly define the invention.

Reconsideration and allowance of all the rejected claims are respectfully requested in view of the following remarks.

Claim Rejections under 35 USC §102

Claims 1-14, 17, 18, 20 and 33 are rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as being anticipated by Helmstetter et al. (U.S. Pub. Appln. 2004/0041373). Applicants respectfully overcome this rejection.

Independent claims 1, 10 and 33 recite, among other things, at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening. According to one embodiment of the invention, material usage is reduced by using portions of metal that normally would be removed to form the inflator opening (see the specification at page 9, paragraph 0032).

Helmstetter et al. disclose that sleeve-like extensions 20 that are formed on the gas back holding element 18 (see Helmstetter et al., page 2, paragraph 0029). While Helmstetter et al. disclose that the sleeve-like extensions 20 are formed in one piece with the gas back holding element 18, Helmstetter et al. do not disclose that the sleeve-like extensions 20 are formed from material that is removed from the opening in the gas back holding element 18. As a result, Applicants claimed subject matter is structurally distinguished from the apparatus of Helmstetter et al., which fails to disclose or suggest at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening.

Since Helmstetter et al. neither disclose nor suggest the invention claimed in independent claim 1 and its dependent claims 2-9 or the invention claimed in independent claim 10 and its dependent claims 11-14, 17, 18 and 20 or the invention claimed in independent claim 33, these claims clearly are not anticipated by, or rendered obvious over, the disclosure of Helmstetter et al. For the foregoing reason, reconsideration and allowance of these claims are requested.

Claims 1, 2, 8, 9 and 28-32 and 34 are rejected to under 35 USC 102(e) as being anticipated by Berrahou et al. (U.S. Pub. Appln. 2004/0239080). Applicants respectfully overcome this rejection.

Regarding claims 28-32 and 34, the Examiner and the Examiner's supervisor agreed during the personal interview conducted on February 7, 2007 that these claims are allowable over Berrahou et al.

Regarding independent claim 1, this claim recites, among other things, at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening. According to one embodiment of the invention, material usage is reduced by using portions of metal that normally would be removed to form the inflator opening (see the specification at page 9, paragraph 0032).

Berrahou et al. disclose an inflatable restraint system that includes a housing having a base plate with a central aperture and a periphery, wherein the base plate includes a plurality of integral hooked tabs extending from the base plate (see Berrahou et al., the Abstract). Berrahou et al. disclose cutting and raising metal segments from a bracket main part (main planar portion 11). More particularly, Berrahou et al. disclose that the plurality of integral hooked tabs 20 are positioned intermediate of periphery 16 and central aperture 12, wherein "intermediate of" should be understood to encompass designs wherein the hooked tabs are formed independently of the outside or outboard edges of the base plate (see Berrahou et al., page 1, paragraph 0014). Berrahou et al. further defines "intermediate of" as stamping and/or cutting of the hooked tabs being not coextensive with portions of the periphery, but rather the cuts are formed inboard thereof (see Berrahou et al., page 1, paragraph 0014). Berrahou et al. discloses an alternative embodiment in which the hooked tabs have common edges with the *base plate periphery* (see Berrahou et al., pages 1 and 2, paragraph 0014).

Berrahou et al. explicitly teaches away from forming the hooked tabs in the central aperture 12. Thus, Berrahou et al. fail at least to teach or suggest at least two retention members

that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening.

In addition, the size of the retention members would be restricted under Berrahou et al.'s structure, in order to retain the strength of the bracket. On the other hand, there is no such concern in the present invention.

Since Berrahou et al. neither disclose nor suggest the invention claimed in independent claim 1 and its dependent claims 2, 8 and 9 or the invention claimed in independent claim 28 and its dependent claims 29-32 or the invention claimed in independent claim 34, these claims clearly are not anticipated by, or rendered obvious over, the disclosure of Berrahou et al. For the foregoing reason, reconsideration and allowance of these claims are requested.

Claim Rejections under 35 USC §103(a)

Claims 1, 2, 8-16, 19, 21-24, 26 and 27 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious over Hodac et al. (U.S. Pat. 5,775,725) in view of Berrahou et al. (U.S. Pub. Appln. 2004/0239080). Claims 10¹ and 21-25 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious over Hodac et al. in view of Berrahou et al., and further in view of Mirone (U.S. Pat. 6,457,379). Applicants respectfully overcome these rejection.

Independent claims 1 and 10 recite, among other things, at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening. According to one embodiment of the invention, material usage is reduced by using

¹ Claim 10 appears to be erroneously included in this rejection because this claim does not recite a horn bracket.

portions of metal that normally would be removed to form the inflator opening (see the specification at page 9, paragraph 0032).

Hodac et al. are deficient at least because they fails to teach or suggest at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening. The Examiner further acknowledges that Hodac et al. are deficient because they fails to disclose "the retention members being stamped integral with the base" (see paragraph number 6 on page 5 of the July 24, 2006 Office Action) and relies on Berrahou et al. for disclosing this feature. Even if Berrahou et al. disclose that the retention members are integral with the base, Berrahou et al. is deficient at least because it fails to teach or suggest at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening. Thus, Hodac et al. and Berrahou et al. are deficient, both alone and in combination.


Regarding Mirone, the Examiner relies on this reference for disclosing "a steering wheel comprising a support structure 1, a bracket 20, and a horn bracket 7 disposed between the support structure and the bracket, the horn bracket including three pin receivers 22" (see paragraph number 7 on page 6 of the July 24, 2006 Office Action). Even if Mirone discloses this feature, Hodac et al., Berrahou et al. and Mirone are deficient, both alone and in combination, at least because they fail to teach or suggest at least two retention members that extend from the base and are formed from material that is removed to define the inflator opening.

For at least this reason, Applicants respectfully submit that the Examiner has failed to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness based on Hodac et al. in view of Berrahou et al. and/or based on Hodac et al. in view of Berrahou et al. and further in view of Mirone. Thus, claims 1 and 10 are allowable. Furthermore, claims 2, 8, 9, 11-16, 19, and 21-27 are allowable at least by virtue of their dependency from corresponding ones of claims 1 and 10.

If the Examiner believes that there is any issue which could be resolved by a telephone or personal interview, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact one of the undersigned attorneys at the telephone number listed below.

Applicants hereby petition for any extension of time which may be required to maintain the pendency of this case, and any required fee for such an extension is to be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

Respectfully submitted,


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Date: March 22, 2007